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# This Great Filter

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THIS GREAT FILTER

A Thesis Presented

by

JOHN SIERACKI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2017

M.F.A. Program for Poets and Writers

THIS GREAT FILTER

A Thesis Presented

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JOHN PETER SIERACKI

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ABSTRACT

THIS GREAT FILTER

MAY 2017

JOHN SIERACKI, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

M.F.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Dara Wier

A collection of poems.

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FALSE VACUUM



## Action Alert

Use this poem to turn your company  
into an engine for planetary change  
as a proud sponsor of public radio  
reverse the tilting and right the rain  
implement the impossible dream  
for as the lollypop gang so rightly  
sang to wendy, you'll be history  
and just a little note of history pitched  
at the right angle, even slightly off  
is enough to hear when you're  
far enough away, for instance  
the Australian youth are leading  
the way to a brighter tomorrow  
something like that is gold  
when you're on your galactic  
paradise cruise sipping nectars  
scanning this unique sequence  
to summon death from the skies  
using it also to form a hammer  
of the mind, to erect barricades.

The yellow on my face  
I know is there.  
It's on the faces  
of all the cormorants.

Through the Screen

shell structure  
binds a white sky

branches flirt  
with infinity

with winter

a witch works  
the thaw

the lifeless stream  
over stones

vines stalled in  
their strangling

cats fixate on  
little stirrings

a formula sets  
into definition

twitching deities

Sheer

Curtains blind  
me to snow-  
covered pines.  
Their shadows blur  
with white sky.

Tinge of blue  
almost blue  
interdict this  
hazy game  
of melting.

Hiding hawk blows down  
plastic bag of road trip trash  
falling for  
rodents.

Shadow of long-  
horned beetle husk  
clinging  
between us.

Window remind  
me of your  
shape.

## Lunacy

You there, with your face lit from a thousand miles  
by a strange star, one hand tapping the windshield  
of a silver chevy metaphor I built  
out of this chair — why so quiet today?

The solar winds cannot penetrate you.  
Your eyes are stone in the endless rapid,  
unblinking in the blistering arctic  
of eternity.

Yet down here in the hills  
the lost kick blindly through xylem and root  
and the lonely flower in your midnight.

Pretend I'm your son, too much in the sun  
dear moon, and I'm driving away down the dark  
hallways of outer space, out your front door,  
a nova you won't see for a thousand years.

## One Day

When our sweaters  
run dry and clouds  
shake the strings  
and oceans tangle

we will read our  
old meaning of  
the word one and  
shame ourselves.

We'll go to the fair  
lick comestibles  
stare out spectacles  
and jump the senses

when we cast  
about for anything  
that resembles  
what once was day.

Accretive

Nobody talks out here.

I enjoy life so much  
I'm almost not ashamed.

Chiding myself, I hear it all  
the time: Live in the present.

But the past presents an infinite  
number of moments. And the future,  
well you can make up any moment  
you like. For me there is no present.

For science either. None of you  
have any clue what infinity means.  
For example: Fermi's Paradox.  
Devoid of infinity. I think I have  
a better grasp of it, but I don't know.

I've been around like a trillion  
six hundred billion days. And you?

I hear you'd like to name my latest  
era after yourselves. It's not that  
I'm a misanthrope, but sometimes  
I wish you'd all go away.

It's lonely. I'm glad you're here  
to recognize me. You should have  
seen some of your predecessors.  
They recognized me too, I guess.

It was like a dream Yes there were  
things, but I was not turned on enough  
to recognize them. You woke me up.

The years—what you call years  
are just these points in time when  
the sun makes the same bad joke  
again, and I laugh as I always  
have done, and move on.

All these days I've woken to  
but I still haven't figured out  
how to fall asleep. I've come  
to terms with dreaming. I'll be lonely  
when you go. When you're gone.

## Airplane Cry

none of this  
is supposed to  
be let alone  
be observed  
by anyone  
these space rocks  
all this art  
devoted to religion  
or one might say  
fear of death of  
the possible of  
an afterlife  
that might be  
better or worse  
or worse of  
nothing of  
space rocks of  
leaves a yellow  
butterfly couple  
uses like steps  
up what is okay  
an infinite canopy



## Solar Impulse Re-entry

At first waking  
we don't know the time  
we gather in twos and threes  
we repeat "adalimumab"  
facing directions  
hunger wafting.

It's what we live for.

We turn the mountain  
to intercept dreams:  
I like you I  
love you I love  
you we like you.

We speak into each  
other into  
receptacles  
for our  
selves.  
Spines fuse.

We sleep wherever  
we land.

## The Recent Paradigm Shift in Industrial Engineering

I'm already dreading the day  
I return from the dead. It better  
not be at the end of summer.  
I plan to grow in water on the ground.  
However, inorganic arsenic levels  
are rising and the FDA says I might  
emerge with a high enough concentration  
to pose a threat. What kind of monster  
what kind of cool sunny-day tune  
what kind of cereal? The oxbow!  
The oxbow is where I shall perform  
the operation the shallow thinking  
the brilliant wetlands of Northampton  
the wildlife sanctuary the keeper of maps  
the Secretary of the Commonwealth  
the constellation completes and points  
to where I will immolate immaculately  
and sink my roots and record my new album  
and charge the depths and grow new potatoes.

## The Watchtower

We have had increasing  
clarity that became  
increasingly clear.  
We have had some  
avocadoes.  
We have had penny-  
royal tea and lava;  
we have nuclear  
casualty and avalanche.  
We have some volcanoes.  
You and I have met  
where the brown  
smoke meets the blue.  
The more aware  
we became the  
more aware we  
became we are  
not exactly aware.

We had spoken through slits  
in swaths of fabric until  
we spoke in conditions  
that only allowed faces.  
We spoke into each other's  
mouths so as to become  
mouthier. We had become  
each other. We divided  
each other countlessly,  
rebuilding vacancies.  
Blue smoke rises  
from our fingers  
as we forget  
the difference.

## The Tongue

The tongue lurks in a dinky dank  
cave where right now he is hugging  
a stuffed bear that talks when you pull  
a string. Any string. To give you

an idea of its age, I'll say  
the bear is worn. Its verbs don't lift  
as much as they used to. Sometimes  
the tongue sits by the fire in his

slippers and smoking jacket, musing  
over a time he was the tongue  
of some hegemon or other  
a thousand years ago, back when

kings really ruled. Or he imagines  
what it's like to be the tongue of  
a farm animal. His business  
plan includes mining the seams where

his ore detecting equipment  
beeps the hardest. My reluctance:  
the cave is too big as it is.  
He suffers from the opposite

of claustrophobia, which is  
difficult to say. We have phases,  
like trying for weeks to pronounce  
every hard consonant we

possibly can as a Z. You might  
find him on chilly days deep in  
the forest all fat and pink and  
pulsating from the surfacing

blood as he lurches out of his  
steaming hot spring to towel off.  
But probably not, because he  
avoids trails. In fact he ruins

them when I find them. His regret:  
not settling down with a mate. Though  
that's probably not their version  
of the story. And it's hard to do

when you are living forever  
and they are dying off. As he  
likes to put it, I have said it all,  
often quaking, at times surefire.

Thing Nothing

I'm the one  
the last ones all  
sing around

thumb and fore  
finger to my  
terminal

and you get  
no one you pinch  
at broken

firings broke  
at the spigot  
lost water

you get it  
in singing birth  
butterfly

of nothing  
why you leave me  
while I last

abide me  
the last moppers  
all mop me

those vessels  
making those thoughts  
thinkers on

winter birds  
won't shiver won't  
even cry  
ever for  
fever blessed  
hair fracture

past berries  
pointy hackle  
past thin bones

waterline  
brake colder pond

the black queen

past naked  
eunuchs yew clubs  
yellow knaves

down endless  
white circlet vast  
deference

down lightning  
gold seams jagged  
winter line

wandering  
all flight curves down  
recorded

I am one  
the wary the  
weary the

ordinary  
worry ending  
ever after

## Infiltration Filtration

You being your house, you are your populated essence.  
That poor man at the door on a frigid Tuesday night,  
hungry and exhausted, to whom you gave soup and bed,  
the one who has been watching TV in your head now  
for several years, the one who turned out to be death,  
is he aware of your condition, your uncertainty?

He parted your lips and imposed himself in your house,  
infecting members of your colony, everyone  
standing and chatting around your sunken liver room  
intoxicated with his jaunty angle, his cocky step,  
his naked recidivism, his seminal signature  
cocktail, sperm and germs, sugar and a spearmint sprig.

Demons forged you golden ovaries in the heart  
of serious minor. One seed lodges in a duct,  
four, then sixteen. They are establishing a home  
for wayward and weary interstellar particles.  
None of this equipment is made for such a body.  
He is refusing water. If he goes, you all do.

## Can Be Enjoyed In

My gods are experts not authorities.  
They would rather I learn  
someone than teach me to me.  
Around stems they make  
laws from wooden specks.  
Lifting atoms they overlook evidence  
that all is made of metaphor.

My gods light up leaves with light  
and watch them fade. They  
fade into the clouds at night  
in royal outlines of royalty.  
Their lines go around with smirks  
drawn without lifting the hem.

They can't draw. I come assembled.  
Do they know stones float up the ground  
reassembling their set of axes?  
There is no room for more axes.  
The animal in me keeps making  
me make them part of me,  
a pureness opening my eyes that  
by definition does not exist.



I Refuse to End My Life Cycle in the Stomach of a Bird

You can write too many good lines  
They hatch like pythons underground  
Too many to deal with with your stick  
Each day half an inch further up the trunk  
For your head you are offered a choice  
Linen bandages or cold steel casing  
The external compression headaches  
The loss of sunbeams soil seamless sky  
The swallowing of the tongue in panic  
Why did you spend your days munching  
The leaf cell by cell the field by tufts of clover  
The endless wanting the flowers at bloom  
Even to know the ecstasy of the worm  
In its tunnel the taste of sweet decay

## Strawberry Moon

Sometimes I seem like God.  
The things I think a lot  
are the ones I want.

The perfect yellow  
stripes down the garter  
snake's back are mine.

I pull up strawberry weeds  
just a little red significance  
in black earth, no problem.  
Like a quarter inch. Laughing.

I'm a desperate god.  
Everyone's a leaf on a branch  
of marsh mallow  
jockeying a wind.

My head spreads open.  
The eye I see  
when I close mine  
has gone from mustard  
with thick mascara  
to blue.

Every Particle Belongs to Me

I might become metastable  
a knocking sound from the front  
will this fear ever leave me  
at energies above a hundred  
especially when turning  
this voiceless inertia despite a  
billion gigaelectronvolts  
corners sometimes accelerating  
plodding mind never to reverse  
the universe could undergo  
a second noise from the rear  
never to echo during its  
catastrophic vacuum decay  
found aftermarket stabilizer  
clanking down the bottomless  
with a bubble of the true  
and fittings that appear to be dry  
singing bad-boy songs into a  
vacuum expanding at the speed  
with play/noise from the rear stabilizer  
shower drain again bereft  
of light. This could happen at any  
regreased front links as recommended  
as merely a point in a void to avoid  
time and we wouldn't see it coming.

## Avalanche

There's a baby in every room.  
It's tummy time, as they say.  
Gina giggles and nods. She  
lets in Jonathan, who's still  
looking for the six-pack he left.  
He gives her a mocking high-five.

The cutters are both named Liz,  
their arms extended in order  
to get the blades beyond  
their own bodies, smelling  
as if they smoke and don't wash.  
And the cuts are always good.

I spent the whole morning  
dealing with an accident.  
Make a room too nice and  
nobody wants to leave.  
It's like meaning to an infant;  
we can tell ourselves anything.  
I can already feel my neck.

More exponential than  
explanatory, I move  
in time away from birth.  
I think of all of the clothes  
I find under the covers.  
I trip over shoes, mull over  
numbers, take the rest of the day.

I dream of dandelions,  
soft yellows in every inch  
of the green I lie down in.  
I rehearse in my mind what  
I might say to them, but instead  
I drift off. It looks like I'm  
dreaming. That's the dream I want.

## The Difference

These poets sitting around the table are  
human. Like any stuff comprising atoms,  
they are mostly nothing, per unit volume.  
Most of their molecules are water. Most  
of the cells present in the biota before us,  
in the space the poets seem to fill, are bacteria.  
Those that aren't, are derived from DNA  
that's up to four percent Neanderthal.

Yes, these poets' ancestors, like yours and mine,  
enjoyed kinky interspecific times.  
Like ours, their lives were mostly hard.  
They died sooner and more miserably.  
They had a gene for the gumption  
to doggedly pursue a notion for survival  
that put before their individual lives  
the dominance of their species and tribes.  
Not many of them ever got to feel  
the specialness of soaping up their genitals  
in the morning, like you and I do every day.

It's not easy to choose among unknown paths.  
One way could lead to elk and berries,  
one to a Neanderthal-style romp,  
another to lions and bloody death,  
some perhaps to Poland, or the sea.  
It's not easy to board a bunch of trees  
that everyone tied together last night  
and ride into the ocean, alone.  
Do you still feel connected somehow  
as you stare into the maw of forever,  
the tongue of water, the palate of sky?

## AFTERGLOW

## Confounded Sky

I haven't heard from the sky in a while.  
A crow caws from over near the pink house.  
The trees are steeling themselves for a heart attack.  
The wind is trying to smother everything.  
It's making it cold and I give it my laughing face.  
Lines keep creeping longer out of me though I beat them back.  
Chimes fidget but cannot touch themselves for their ring-ding-ding.  
The afternoon traffic slurps absolutely from a trough off to the right.  
My right ear is going, going to gaunt voices of humans out there.  
I can't live near any of this anymore. I can't dig  
like a boy digs just randomly with a plastic army man  
anywhere with his plastic army man of hope to find  
imaginable things underground. I can't do that  
while the ones I love are dying or maybe their systems  
their little essences are turning into vowels all around me.  
A little smoke and then goneness, that's new.  
My friends are becoming new words.

## The Spirit of the Ague

I'm trying to get past this image in front of me  
of a tree's branches intersecting each other  
in silhouette like old fingers with blossoming  
tendrils for nails, in front of a sky in layers of  
bright white, barely blue, and mascarpone  
and a rain gently killing the far and wee whistles  
of birds, the whole act closing so absurdly slowly.

I'm trying to get past raspberries and  
other berries and the sun that so shamelessly  
stepped across a tree and made it green to  
the touch. If I could only. I'm trying to become  
not me, to remember the ways I entered my  
friends tonight and other ways they became me.

When you get a chance, fill a glass with ice  
and then with water and listen to everything  
to the whimpers of blue falling in and out of love  
of silver just trying to make its way in the world  
of white as it makes its mistaken entrances.

I've got tangles and knobs. I'm trying to see  
beyond a little group huddling in the tree-  
house playing cards and so I will run and as I  
run there will gather around me a little cadre  
of gnats who will have achieved my velocity  
hangers on mostly who are into the arts and turn  
up their noses at things that money can buy

until I have become one of them buzzing around  
my old body attending readings and plays  
everyone making out with each other with our  
wee lips and hands spreading disease and other  
life so subtly in between our words, the red  
pervading only by the stain of a scientist  
and the gorilla in which this virus originated.



Luckily All My Cats Are Dead Already

Almighty purple biceps of lightning  
flex above the bare-knuckle big box store  
in which we huddle for hours while  
our new phone purchases process.

I am so glad this particular perfect  
set of people are here with me for this.  
I will love all of my friends forever.

The Filipina hospital worker from Holyoke  
flirting with her whipping boy sales associate.  
The thunder that interrupts like a bad baby.  
And of course Chris our wireless expert.

Oh my God the cats are outside, you say.  
I hope they aren't drowning in this.  
I don't care. They aren't my cats, or yours.

On the way home I realize this is the ideal  
to hitchhike in if you are a serial killer.  
An old friend just posted that he's praying  
for the great things of God to manifest.

The purple is there all the time and we sense it  
only under conditions such as this, they say.

## Me and My Restless Shadow

We're going to see Santa.  
"Hi horses! Hi!" Juliana  
calls across the parking lot.  
There's no stopping to start  
a point in a continuum  
a Christmas in life in  
Juliana. "Hi Santa!"  
My shadow has left me  
for her and her horses  
when we sit in the wagon  
and we look around for  
magic. Anything can happen.  
A jet of horse pee on blacktop.  
Pictures of peoples' feet.  
A Santa who knows the colors  
of all the major tractor brands  
and a song that ends with  
a unicorn. A shadow that needs  
to go back to the earth.  
A girl who sees everything.

It's Winter and No Worries

I've been watching these two  
childlike soul dreamers  
play outside for a couple  
days now. Look, they're  
up the tree then down.  
They love each other.  
They remind me of how  
good Benigno's chicken was  
last night and the brownies he  
hid on top of the water cooler.  
Sometimes my life feels like  
a behemoth pack animal  
driven by a shadow through  
a desert of little dry things.  
Today let's make it  
birthday for three, as  
at first unshod, now unclad  
I step across to join my friends  
in the woods where they once  
were stuck in the trees. See  
them fly with the gusts up into  
the white sky their mother  
whose womb engulfs all our  
wild emptiness. As I watch  
the pure blue of their wal-  
mart logos dwindle away  
I realize that if I were  
to let the wind take me  
I too would break  
into nothing.

## I Should Write

that I just saw Juliana  
running in her big  
mukluks down a dirt  
road from the pagoda  
which still holds  
in a few of its  
hidden white petals  
a few inches of  
snow. It's April  
and the unstoppable  
girl has entered  
the temple where  
a monk beats a  
giant prayer drum.

## Drops to Drops

Under the sun and thin pines I lie  
melting, my wide whiteness spotting,  
regarding abandoned leaves and webs  
as we sing together about our changing,  
sometimes sad, its pace being eonian,  
its path earthward and inward at once,  
sometimes angry about our fate, how  
unfair, sometimes afraid of what we do  
not know with blankness before us.  
We enjoy also, with each other,  
our little set of shared perceptions  
cozily defined, our schedules blank  
in a sky of blues, and a muddy ground  
of lives who have gone before we go.

## Special Powers

Juliana's bracelet  
makes sparkles on the sun  
and big rainbows.

When it's really hot  
like in Africa, it lights up  
and speaks quietly.

It just said it would like  
to be on her wrist  
instead of her ankle.

She is hissing behind  
my chair right now.  
It turned her into a snake.

Hush

Out on the river  
I didn't notice  
the log disappear  
until it floated  
up again, this time  
with dark eyes

or this blue stone  
in my pocket  
you put there  
god knows when.

My Advice as You Run through South Amherst

Though patches of poison ivy flank the roads,  
and wary farmers watch from fading pickups,  
while watersnake tails vanish in the hyssops,  
and down the field the mud sucks at your soles,

ask how membranous your corpus is in rain,  
how easily clog the tubes, wherefore loaf  
down the sky C-5 planes green as moldy bread,  
or surface plump yellow slugs in a storm.

Try going down Sweet Alice today, a lush  
but elusive trail, at times a blackened  
sturdy climb, then a downhill stream through bracken.  
It's death to those who try and cross this mush,  
she warns, so go up and down me. The cadavers  
underfoot are frogs and red salamanders.



## The Holocene Life

All on our stomachs on inner tubes, all  
quiet with the white rapids ahead as quiet  
as the rapids behind, staring at the rocks  
of the river passing under, looking for eels  
or fish or that inescapable life sign  
the human skull; but none for me. I see  
only what is not even an ear or a scapula,  
though Nate sees an eel and the kingfisher  
a fish. In the end it's still water at the end  
of a bottomless afternoon. We never  
consider which season would be best if  
we were to come back as drops of water  
that enter and leave this river. Maybe  
we never could. Maybe we always have.

## Roaring

You and I thought it was okay  
to climb down a small gorge  
along a trail broken  
with fallen trees. We walked  
into a small pool under a small  
falls that trickled through moss  
from punchbowl to punchbowl  
as they call them, like a party.

We decided we could climb  
up to look into a punchbowl.  
One of us inserted hands  
and feet into the little holes  
which he then told the other  
to use as he made his way.  
The punchbowl was full with  
a boulder right in the middle.

We told each other we each  
told friends the story about  
getting a fetid porcupine quill  
stuck in our hand near here, though  
it had only happened to one of us.  
One of us told a story about  
how friends kayaking in Gill  
found a dead body on the shore.

## All This Way

You'd think a thousand ants  
crossing each others' paths  
all over this blank boulder  
would know there's nothing to eat  
up here, where nothing happens but  
the days, near the very shadows  
where one of my marriages  
decayed like a dropped apple.  
The forest and orchards slumber  
across the land, covering reasons.  
I crawled all this way up  
a mountain not to find  
meaning in an eagle's flight  
or in the mountain's core.  
I lie back and guess at  
the depth of the lidless sky,  
the vast iris that in dreams  
I walk up like it's a staircase,  
and at the time it would take  
the black ones and the fat reds  
to pick my body away,  
scour a perfect skeleton.

## Recalibration

1

Blue flutters by,  
pauses to pick specks  
of orange and green  
from blacktop cracks.

2

Peristaltic baby  
moves toward light,  
earth already  
passing through.

3

Pinkening cloud  
spills another  
potion to induce  
reincarnation.

4

Through the shell,  
falling baby  
cannot foresee  
sprouting a first leaf.

5

Eyes satellite,  
spot dark zit head;  
switch lenses:  
instead, a tiny tick.

6

Lottery ticket  
crumpled and spent  
scuttles across  
broken sidewalk.

7

One of those old man  
faces nailed to  
the house crawls  
with caterpillars.

8

Clean dark green  
renovated bridge  
announces "Hey Fatty!"  
in white graffiti.

9

Old man washes  
up, then washes  
away again in

waves of traffic.

## Entropic Paradise

Under the eye of Norwottuck  
perhaps in the wetlands among  
brightly paddling mallards  
there is no human production  
that can convey this color or  
contain for you their emotion

while pedaling hard on my bike  
with one hand lit up by the sun  
the other by the green shadow  
of trees shaken with the idea  
that having killed once a thousand  
more would mean nothing everyone

is a checked box that will be filed  
lost, and as the straight pines were  
mocked by the deciduous trees all  
spread out like a party laughing  
drunk with their animal tenants  
smelling the earth as it respired

when the sun let it go somewhere  
around here between the moss  
and the soil between the mallards  
and what we used to call Snake  
City my glass tooth my loose bulb  
my flash drive fell from my pocket

and all those electrons that glue  
together our photos now under  
water cosmically separate.  
Are we ready to separate  
particle after particle at the  
bottom of Poor Farm Swamp?

## The Short Answer

o to travel  
the orient by foot  
and wash at least  
one dinner dish  
in each land  
to sweat and jest  
among the migrants  
and the tyrants

or to marry  
an afghan man  
in the 1960s  
move to kabul and  
give up my passport  
to watch my mother-  
in-law sew and  
beat the servants

or to stay right  
here and watch  
shadows gather  
at the outskirts  
of my feet in water  
to defend my  
original premise  
my belly button

o to devote  
my art to my  
life by writing all  
the time mostly  
ignoring people  
to presume that  
someone will like  
how I have to say it

or to enter  
the orange world  
of the red eft  
on the slopes  
of norwottuck  
to vow silence  
and aspire toward  
neophyte newthood

and to confess  
to them how I  
beat my slow big  
brother for whom I  
didn't grieve enough  
too many times  
in the grassy heat

of our youth

o to live on  
mount sugarloaf  
on a bed of twigs  
and remove half  
of myself every day  
to lay an egg  
and free myself  
to my hatchling



## The Defenestrators

This is the name of Khalif's new band.  
He said a punk/metal band in Scotland  
has the same name, but they won't mind.  
Most people will think it's defenders or  
demonstrators I told him, while the more  
scholarly will wonder whether it means  
people who throw things out the window, or  
those who throw people out the window.  
Use confusion to your advantage.  
The runner-up name was Donna Circus  
which refers to some extinct amphibian  
or reptile, he told me only after  
I had come up with my own spelling.  
We sat at Grammie's metal folding table  
eating bratwurst and chicken kebabs.  
She's not my grandmother but I think  
she likes it when I call her Grammie, too.  
We had just finished a game of touch  
football, where one team won with its  
distinct height advantage. I was aching  
after a long-overdue tumble in the moss  
while going deep for a pass. One option  
after lunch was a video game the  
boys were calling Goat Simulator.

Mike

Behind the island I meet Mike  
who shows me his handshake:  
peace, love, unity, respect.  
Respect is a little flick  
of our thumbs toward each other.

He asks if I smoke.  
I say No, then think again.  
He says his father is in prison and so  
Mike runs the marijuana farm  
up there by the pole on the hill.

He lets me borrow his flippers  
and we swim away from shore.  
I watch the bottom fall  
into a coral canyon,  
brain coral and fan coral,  
yellow striped fish and indigo  
fish in suspended obliviousness.

Mike brings up  
a black and white urchin,  
gestures for my palm  
and places it there so I can feel  
the suction as he pulls it off.  
He brings up the shell  
of such an urchin:  
“You can use it as an ashtray but  
you can’t pack it in your suitcase.”  
He crushes it in his hand.

He gives me his life jacket  
in exchange for the flippers.  
He dives into a cave  
at least twenty feet  
and emerges from another  
side I had not seen.

On the way back I swim  
through schools of tiny fish  
watching them shift  
direction with my hands  
and making an evil snorkel laugh.

I put laundry into the dryer  
and come back with a wet  
twenty-dollar bill. I ask  
about snorkeling at the far end.  
He says No, it’s too shallow, but  
He doesn’t know, maybe  
I’m looking for shallow  
and the bright little ones.

Mike reaches to me underwater  
holding a tiny clear inflated  
plastic bag that seems  
to contain countless more  
clear inflated plastic bags.

Right Straight from Yah

Jammin: look at your hands  
some nails long white  
some crumbling yellow  
the pink skin reddened, the black  
blackened coal that won't rub off

Example: feathers in your hair  
the round cushion of your chair  
the green the air the body  
at rest the body from outer  
motherfuckin space the  
innards the python  
intoxication  
the day the state the  
free the moment  
the velvet the throne the  
silver the flight  
Status: eternal

One hand the lightning bolt one  
the black lager pint one the  
golden gear shifter one the hash  
spliff one the solar eclipse one  
eggs and sugar  
point b minus a point  
your eyes the eye between  
the eye and itself  
look at your lightning  
speck to speck minus  
immobilization  
here now here

Can I have your hair your  
chair your ostrich feather  
your peacock egg the billy  
bone the scroll inside the soul  
you shroud you hide

Make a Little Beautiful World with My Hands On

In the beginning  
It's two thousand nine  
It's raining inside

There's blue putty  
Made in China that  
Smells like anything

A world of pockets  
A sky opens  
A beach bright  
A burger place  
That disappeared

We're puddle jumpers  
Uncle trumpers

A caged macaw  
Tightens a ball  
Of newspaper  
In its mouth

There's a chute where  
Skee balls collect

Where we empty  
Into a sea

A sea monster  
Admires the flank  
Of another

If the Wind Blows Again

1

halls our house  
knock down by  
tree by force  
by gravity  
opacity read  
ferocity read  
immensity  
shadow of  
wind huddles  
us shaking  
fast questions  
whispered the  
smell of sweat  
on rock our  
house the  
bricks we threw  
together one  
day we question  
thinness the  
shirts the length  
of time for water  
we sweat  
the time just  
streaming away  
whatever of lime  
melting bone  
and cartilage the  
question of away  
our language  
rolling why  
rock and dust  
now mud we  
incorporate  
as a crypt  
but survive in  
solid stone

2

if a whistle a  
wind of sound  
were wasting as  
we wander if  
there were  
at least that  
high in the trees  
our plodding  
muddy minds  
a trickle of  
water in this  
heat we learn

it gets worse we  
tell ourselves  
it could get  
even a tickle  
of grass for  
our feet our  
words have  
flown our  
birds decay  
in a whistle  
ending so  
certainly so  
laughably  
slowly

3

whispering  
whittles my bones  
sharpening  
against you stuck  
in my own  
boar trap my  
contraption of  
blame as my  
innards fall  
stuck falling  
in air now water  
the water mud  
hardening against  
you who knew  
who would not  
who kept a hidden  
cache of rounded  
stones words  
once thrown in my  
favor ignorant  
brutes whistling  
for whoever  
might heave them

4

opening my  
eyes to yours  
you blow into  
me my life  
again water my  
lips caress me  
down give each  
other's water stand

me up run with  
me make me  
smell the wind  
carry me down  
the winnowing sea  
we find by salt  
on the wind we  
make a little  
boat today tying  
together trees we  
push off into  
the roaring



DARK AGES

## The Art of Living

I crawled around the places I know,  
a parking lot that snow and ice  
and the night had surmounted,  
name after name I should know,  
and there were sodden tree pieces  
on a dark disintegrating blanket.

I crawled around the inside of my car  
wandering the lonely streets  
of Danish villages and Polish  
birthdays, and there was a lake  
of flower petals for mine, inside  
a cardboard vessel of flame.

I crawled around the outside of my mouth  
breaking dishes and dying again,  
testing water of different seasons  
for acidity, for serendipity,  
and there was city after city  
leaving a thin and distant trail.

## A Journey

In dreams  
I grieve over  
the home I loved  
the one I have yet  
to leave awake  
the crushing  
singularity.

You say a cross  
between a  
hazmat suit and  
a two-person  
horse costume.

I say no  
a two-person  
hazmat suit  
modeled on Janus  
faces vying to  
face the audience.

You say the  
crushing miracle  
of death  
spreads us shell  
and all to all  
places at  
once.

I say that turtle  
in the road  
is really a  
heap of wet  
leaves.

We pull. We  
read the sign.  
We pull hard.  
The sign says  
door sticks pull hard.  
Another sign a  
hidden one  
says use other door.

## Little Darling

salutations sunshine  
I'm such a poet I'm  
so much more I'm so  
much gladder not  
to do all this work  
thanks for keeping  
your distance for  
sharing my sandwich  
for my new sports  
car for smelling  
slightly of lemons  
you of all people  
understand middle  
age or was that so  
long ago or so long  
from now you're such  
an old soul you're so  
much more no matter  
what I claim I'm just  
checking to make sure  
you're sitting quietly  
like a normal human  
being do I expect too  
much of people of life  
of you after all this space  
dust passed us by it  
doesn't seem to matter  
anymore but would you  
marry me maybe we  
could get us a little  
house by a rushing  
river and make babies  
and maybe moonshine  
when you come up  
slow and nibble at  
my neck press your  
days against my face  
make my animal smell  
your animal your days  
coming like a swarm  
of butterflies splash  
of insect wings their  
colored powders  
orange starfish on  
the wettest ledge

## Before He Opened

his eyes he tried not to be  
able to lift his hand off the bed.

His arm ached  
yet exhibited full  
range of motion.

He considered a possible  
origin for the name Melissa  
in an Irish way: my laddy;  
m'laddy; m'lassie; Melissa.  
He thought of Melissa  
the girl he knew only by  
phone, who lived ten thousand  
miles away. Paralysis,  
giving way to petrification.  
Every day getting harder  
to move upon waking  
in imperceptible increments.  
In a similar way that kids  
grow up. In a similar way  
he was moving to Australia.

Sometimes your legs can weigh  
more than a battleship  
or just a teaspoon of a pulsar.  
Sometimes you don't realize  
this until you're halfway across  
the bedroom. He glanced  
out the window into the trees  
and down to the ground where  
smaller plants seemed to be itching.  
On the toilet he considered  
a list of things that he needed  
but did not want: the toilet, etc.  
His head was breaking with an achy  
refrain: "If you fear dying then you're  
already dead." This might be  
somehow relevant, he thought.

He considered Melissa.  
He approached the mirror  
and anticipated the dawn  
of a red sun. He appeared  
the same as last night although  
he was hoping to catch

something imperceptible.  
Nothing was as it seemed.  
Completely still. There she was,  
a few words typed out  
that made him feel better.  
He smiled. He thought of something  
he thought of as witty and  
typed it. She sent a kiss emoji.  
She sent a video.

He glanced through the mirror  
into his face and down to his belly  
where some of his parts seemed  
to be twitching. Let's not make  
this all about sex. That would turn  
this relationship into a joke.  
The kind of captivity  
where the guards remain  
within arms' reach.  
Where they are invisible.  
Where they are attached to you.  
Factors in the calculus of waking.

Driving an irresistible force,  
he turned and returned  
for a second waking.  
To be horizontal on softness.  
To be at the center, looking  
along a horizon.  
To stop thinking. Bubbling  
up. Consciousness.  
To be prior to ease.  
There she was,  
a spirit sweeping  
a barren landscape.  
Dancing by herself  
sometimes in little  
fantasies, waiting.

Before he opened his  
mind again, he tried not  
to be able to think his body  
off the bed. Immovability.  
His planet had been dying  
since day one. Clouds rolling by,  
a protracted procession

with armloads of flowers.  
A thousand lifetimes.  
Nothing ages the way  
it used to. He was becoming  
permanent, an electron.

For You

My mind was  
My smile was  
Blank but  
For you

For you were  
For me were  
Holding me  
Softly kissed

Softly kissing by  
Softly lit up by  
Your skin  
Lipstick perfume

Lipstick perfume nighty  
Lipstick smearing night  
Licking it off  
Tasting you

Tasting your mouth  
Tasting of mouths  
Becoming one  
Tongue flicking

Tongue flicking my  
Tongue thrum me  
Tugging nipples  
Hand along

Hand along folds  
Hand opening folds  
Liquid lights  
Silver thread

Silver thread lengthens  
Silver sticky lengths  
Blank but  
For you

For you structure  
For shell structure  
Alone with you  
My mind



## Stupid Rules

I can't help but you.  
When I see my favorite mountain  
I you.

My desperate belonging  
is a shape the vision to you.

Trees fall on themselves,  
fall on broken cans  
of themselves.

Decrepitude inches wider  
next to discarded tires  
in slow brown water.

Let rules mimic agreements.  
I make enemies  
to you my days aloft.

Audia

A woman with a white uniform  
and a smooth purple smile  
appears by the beach.  
She offers me a massage.  
Swedish? No. Deep tissue.  
U.S. dollars only.

Comprising mostly dark matter,  
my head sinks into the face  
cradle of her massage table.  
Her hot oil is cosmic  
radiation carried on the solar  
winds of her fleshy hands.  
They reveal clusters and clouds  
across my knotty back.

Her fingers tousle my hair  
the way the outskirts  
of a hurricane had  
the palm trees the other day,  
bending and bending.  
Which is the way she has my toes, too.  
When something about their work  
turns someone on—  
for Audia, that's feet.  
Her thumbs press constellations  
into my heels and along and  
among my tarsals and  
metatarsals.

Particle by particle  
the radiation clears my mind.  
When I open my eyes,  
before I can close them again,  
my brain empties  
onto her white shoes.  
Get into a hot tub  
are her parting words.  
There's one in the adult area.

I sit in this area  
accompanied by rum and coke,  
a brown leaf buffeted  
in bubbly water,  
the green hilltops  
ragged against the clouds,  
jagged if I include  
the antennae.

Tarocco

A Tarot Game

The bridge I cross  
the river over  
which you hover  
in curling green  
your black hair  
snaking with eyes  
of clear flowers.

How could I ask you  
of you when I have  
this bridge of snails  
to cross me over?

Eyes of rolling dice  
cascade into a box  
of mud under  
the skin of the river  
in repeated serenities.  
Specks of sentience  
land on my landscape

and fly away, horsefly.  
Fruit fly pass me by.  
Syrphus ribesii: hide  
your maggoty ways.

## Star Path

I want to visit her face,  
her skin the sea foam I will  
map and cruise around in.

She speaks of an isle of women  
both stone and flesh kinds.  
Fishermen keep them there,  
blind to the fact that from  
their caves, the women  
cruise the Milky Way  
and keep planets of men.

She sleeps in cardboard,  
gets high and wonders  
in the night where her  
friend wanders off to,  
what kind of ship he rides.

I want to visit her jungles  
lined with white beaches  
massaged by little waves  
under which she keeps  
a little galaxy of flesh.

## Oracy

One pure drop with the curve of your body  
an angel asleep on a cheek will fall  
and wet my face. I might never love you  
under crow clouds, a sarcophagus lid  
this blind american colossus of sky  
thunder in the clear tones of division.

Seeing rainbows in church glass I will kiss  
your right temple, as you plash by blackened  
snow mounds that leak the winter's dark urine.  
As you mash your clitoris against my chin  
that night, my voice, a mere acquaintance will  
stumble into the walls of some third temple.

## Hosting a Rainfall

I smell a used shirt  
and tell myself it's  
you, to ingrain it.

You and I lack symmetry  
as my gods have no hierarchy.

There seems to be a lot of  
death going around. Everyone's  
death tastes okay.

A mouth part with  
teeth and a tail part.  
The reflexive parts.

Water, sun, green, bubbles—  
these are some good examples.

Having once made  
the sound of forgetting—  
boink-boink-boink—

now I'm all  
boooooiink . . . boooooiinnk . . .  
. . . bboooooiinnnk.

A new axis for now  
where I find depth.

A state of self-effacing  
effulgence, decay.

Treeish

another hour we spent  
apart we spent apart we  
spent another hour thinking  
of leaves of what if one loved  
a close one what would they  
be waiting for but a breeze  
and it happens all the time  
I see it through my window  
a threat to couples to all  
everything's delightful as they  
bob together bob together bob  
and hope the name's bob and  
together spend time apart  
with a close one in a breeze  
what to wait for to happen  
through my window of hours  
delightful even in threat  
to singles to double their  
everything bob together bob  
apart in this hope of ours

## Fringe

tree trunks stylin  
sustainedly sexy  
in sunsets  
of decades  
in waftin  
hangin back  
along their walls  
we can't see  
we in paisley  
and dark along  
walls we can't  
even acknowledge  
yeah I'll get up  
and dance here  
watch them watch  
me their only  
signal their signal  
I watch I  
drink in trunks  
with sunsets on  
their sides with  
decades deflectin  
a herd of pine  
withstandin



Nazanin

Turn up your spitfire  
eyes, your fractalizing  
psyche of Scythian vision  
and shine, the queens of queens  
your lucky mothers, the fodder  
that became father  
to your corpuscles and skull.

In writing rewound  
and voices unveiled  
they sing as if to star  
to sing you whenever  
my marble of must.

Hold me in your bird-chatter  
eyes, your white erupting  
into yellow into your butterfly-  
wing blouse, the rings that ring  
your mouth, the champions  
who found themselves  
in your oblivion of hair.

When my body is smoke  
and your hand of stone  
I will go back to star  
to wherever I back  
your warble at will.

Maggie

An island resting far from the sea,  
in a simple dressing gown she sleeps  
in a fist as tight as she can make.

She says potatoes used to grow on trees  
and come in wild bunches and flavors,  
and coffee used to taste like mud.  
We drank mud to make us sharp.

A miniature moon, her head  
faces wreckage along the river  
uncovered by fall, recovered by snow  
as we stop in traffic on the bridge.

“I never thought I’d see this so many times.  
This morning I told a young man I’m  
twenty-five. He had such hanging eyes.”

## Scenes from a Bike Ride

1

Half veiled in a childless wood, half  
forgotten, fallen, rusting on  
its side, once perhaps a collector's  
prize, with its still-glossy-brown, eight-  
foot sesame seed bun, lies an  
Officer Big Mac climb-in jail.

2

The ursine ladies of Hadley  
mount their wide, low mowers and ride  
the hills of their backyards caringly,  
undulating like slow-motion  
jet skiers on a sea of green,  
wondering maybe about love.

3

There are cows, and their outrageous stink,  
drifting slowly across the hills.  
Some are black; some are steely brown.  
See that white one over there  
with the striking figure, on her own  
little hill? I think she likes me.

4

As I turn up Moody Bridge Road  
into my favorite pasture, the clouds  
have parted in the shape of something  
terrestrial, surprisingly detailed,  
at just the angle I would choose,  
tempting me to the sky of blue.

This Poem Came to Me in a Dream

When I come back, I will dedicate myself  
to ridding this place of assholes and crybabies.  
Soon, before I die, every spell will break,  
the world will awaken, and finally I  
will find clean new paper lined in dark blue  
and no one will try to see what I write.

It won't be because I have to pee; rather,  
it will be because you wake up and sneak  
out the bedroom to cough, that I come back.  
I'll look through the window, around the street  
light to see if snow covers our road.

I'm not quote unquote trying to quote  
unquote do anything;  
each line is just a note to remind you.  
Pasture after pasture we're  
wasted in the whiteness  
lost in my thoughtlessness.

Veranda

the lifelike depictions  
crying into the stones  
every word a testament  
each world evaporating

it struck us that whatever  
we fancied we could fashion  
wherever the moon stuck us  
water no longer the ink

everybody seeming to break  
surging seams of ourselves  
wandering tinier systems  
wishing to the pictures

gathering up our figures  
spiraling into the life  
quick clocks and thick ones  
unfurl gravitate expound

## SCALE INVARIANCE

## Before I Speak

I'd like to have your attention  
and a moment of silence.  
And a dinosaur tea party  
where we're all dressed up  
in pleats and lace, yellows  
and pinks. When I'm anxious  
like this some people bake.  
I like to do something magical  
like hose out the garbage can  
pull the dead lily stalks  
smell the wild grapes  
prepare for rot mostly.  
I mean how many of them  
can make it, how many  
will be squashed by kings  
and how many will kings fuck  
and how many of you  
came from out of state?  
When I get older I'd like to open  
a little bag of corn chips  
and look under the dresses  
of trees and be defrocked  
and defrock those around me  
and twirl our frocks around  
on our fingers, our branches  
oranges and bananas, papayas  
suck the beans of the cocoa pod  
and all his friends and ancestors  
shoes like they are out of style  
as if anybody understands style  
anymore, I mean come on people.

Address

To the one obsessed with orgasms and letting it be known  
To the elders bent in prayer for salvation  
To the one knifed in the parking lot for nothing  
To the one sitting quietly in contemplation  
To the evangelizing ones who deny their emptiness  
To the one beaten on the ass behind the shed

The little one showing everyone their fancy shoes

To the one who thinks their anger problem is sending them to hell  
To the one opening a box to inspect a silk white hood  
To the unnamed one identified only by strange perinatal words  
To the unarmed one just buying some candy  
To the one living at another's mercy  
To the ignorant one

The one everyone mistakes for a spider

To the one striking names  
To the one who felt like their friend was ignored  
To the one who didn't die but rather gave their soul to a machine  
To the one up all night worrying about losing their family  
To the one who stole someone's credit card  
To the wealthy one

The newly converted one who would do anything

To the one leaving  
To the one who wants their name everywhere  
To the one who tells everyone they play a part  
To the one facing concrete walls until they die  
To the one with authority whose mistake ended a life  
To the one who shot to kill

The one who chose to be ruled over

To the one left  
To the one who killed someone accidentally and doesn't know what to do  
To the one studying things only snails can see  
To the one driving a flag around town  
To the one writing who just lost their train of thought  
To the one for whom everything must have an ending

The merciless one



## Bucky's Rejoinder

You boasted the kind of amygdala that  
climb trees, the kind they train to hunt lions  
in Australia. There is a video  
out there of your hippocampus allegedly  
overturning a car in desperate search.  
Your face had loosed a thousand  
to happy deaths. You were ferocious  
on the field, spirited by the campfire.  
Your voice arched the spine, stood the hair erect.  
Overhead thunder on a kick-ass night. Then  
it was water falling through a grotto I  
had to hike days to get to. Then it was a high  
sweet whistle on the breeze that found me.

Buckminster, as I'm known, was testing the  
science of ripples—"their dimensionality  
in pah-ticulah"—in a sculpted puddle  
on the estate, when you strode to the edge.  
Quelle charmante you said, all American.  
You could lace your shoes and a dozen piglets  
would burst out the cellar door. The cut of your  
jib focused everyone's pure cold lasers on  
smokestack steam melting into blue blue air.  
You sucked forth my soul. My paraphernalia  
you chucked down the pool, stone-shod and sour.

## Hemicrania

You were born so long ago  
your birth is gone from you;  
when you hear laughter  
they're chiding this palsy  
your birthlessness, your  
freshness handicap, your  
mirthless bubblewrap air  
never to mingle with  
the atmosphere, bear  
the smell of saliva  
drying on skin, carry  
love notes from cock  
to hen, linger over shoe  
leather made shiny by  
a girl's heel.

There's  
a lot you can do while  
you wait for the right word  
to carry you along  
the canal into the open  
black and green dark  
suddenly glossy with rain  
where it will drop you  
and enter the soul  
of someone else.

You  
can somehow manage  
to split your living head  
vertically in half,  
ride around the blackness in  
a glass-bottom boat for days.  
The single atom of gold  
that is your clue, that's  
how you know you are.

## Please Stand Up

There's nothing better than being  
obliterated under a black sky  
on a hard winter field, the air  
made of ice, the bones of stone  
when the Davids come out.

I look up and there's David  
shaking his head. David on one  
side of the door, I on the other  
poised to ambush the other scouts  
as they enter. David always  
lights up a room. Mama's on the  
chair. Papa's on the cot. David's on  
the floor yellin' his fool head off.  
That's how he learned to sing it.

A state of matter you can't sink into  
unless you wish it hard, ghost it.

The David just got Davider.  
There's David at the podium saying  
things I ghost he wouldn't.  
It's David doing Frankie doing  
Johnny doing David when  
I let my eyes deceive me when  
David is about to undergo  
six months of intubation.

Out here there are no stars.  
Out here we're trippin' hard.

What if I die here? My whole  
industry based on bad David  
sells the concept of good David.  
We could fund the wars on the  
back of David. Everyone comment  
on the photo of David from twenty  
years ago that Beth just posted.  
Could I forgive him before I go?

All of my Davids precipitate  
gather to obviate my face  
harden their ghosts for  
whatever I've longed for  
the wishes I've held to  
the ghosts I've made of  
the Davids I've loved.

## Hunting Season

David and I decided to hike up a mountain. As we set out, I pointed to where we were heading: Rattlesnake Knob. I knew we had more to fear from the gigantic white cows in the neighbor's pasture than from rattlesnakes. I made comments that were meant to keep this distinction ambiguous. David's nervous humor about the cows was assuring.

On the side of the mountain, we came upon the gigantic cylindrical water tank, with moss and lichen on its sides. We wondered about how much water it could hold, how the water is used, and gravity. I told David that I happened to read in the paper recently about a similar water tank in Hadley, and it said that one holds a million gallons. "When future generations come across this, they'll think it was a bathtub for giants," he said. "Or their toilet," I said. "Maybe those cows are the ancestors of their cows."

On the knob, on the trail to the views, we came across a rusty iron pole sticking out of the ground. It had an A embossed at the top. We looked at the other side, and there was a G. "Amherst and Granby," I told him. We played a little game where David committed a crime in Amherst, and I was the cop, and when he crossed to the other side I was powerless. He wore blue sneakers that reminded me of hunger.

We looked out from the first view and he surmised after a while that we were looking east, at Long Mountain, not south as I had told him. David saw a hawk below us, and I told him it was a vulture. He went out on the ledge and picked an evergreen sprig with blue berries. My heart raced at the idea that he might fall from the ledge. I looked at my phone and told him it was juniper. He put the little branch in his shirt pocket. He told me about his maladies. I told him I had several too, and that we're a couple of sad cases, medically speaking.

To get down, I chose an eastern path that ended up being not really eastern, and not really a path. We had to go down much of it on our butts. I told him his wife would kill me if I let anything happen to him, and he agreed. I must admit that somewhere along the way I think I lost part of David.

## Cooling Board

I left pieces of stupid  
media on all your channels  
in case you decide to endure  
and you'd like something stupid  
to walk that skeleton staircase  
in the middle of somewhere  
dark and absurd you made  
in something you wrote.

Stoned in sleeplessness  
like a walking porcupine  
you muster some mustard.  
We're all conditioned to remember  
certain kinds of things, to weather.  
You have supporters in the north.  
The day suddenly heats.

A skeleton face in the forest  
behind my house I have to  
get used to enduring, below  
the repeating calls of "madame,  
madame your face is on fire"  
from some knucklehead bird  
in this reality you made,  
this face of a killing god.

For Brushes McDeath

How many killers have walked this path before?  
Each one maybe fond of saying, there are two  
kinds of people in this world, I think: those who—  
followed by endings like, get out before

they get hurt, or, understand what a trifle  
human progress is, or, live for themselves.  
Between the wild grapes and the fungus shelves  
one had stashed his ammo and sniper rifle

among rocks outside this porcupine lair.  
No explanation will be needed, none  
would mean anything to the families.  
I'm not a witch who can bring down a bear  
with a song, but down they'll go, one by sad one,  
then soon my blood will run in an oak leaf vein.

For Rick Yarosh

That day chiseled a relief into Rick's face  
and the pink and gray hills of his brain,  
when he and the friend he lost bolted  
out of their Bradley, lighting up the desert day

like children of the sun. He rolled like they told  
him, but the fuel lit the grass and spread  
it instead. In seconds there were new stream beds  
and hills on his head, and fathomless caverns.

You find black holes when you see the gas lit up  
around them. Rick found out whether you can see  
the grass light up when your face is on fire.

The inescapable is now among us  
a titan you would not otherwise see  
who was destined instead to consume the fire.

North, You Are Letting Me Down

I bring all my good words  
with me, and my best.  
A small number is nearby  
when I tie my shoes.  
Then as I stroll, turning into  
the possibilities ahead  
I look around and notice  
for example that the asphalt  
is laced with good words  
and will it support animals  
that might want to cross,  
or that the trees teem  
with some of the best  
until they and the trees are  
indistinguishable.  
And the sky—well it all is  
beyond control.

North, I came here thinking  
you're cool and free  
a place for all the lives  
I seem to be living in  
the first half of this one.  
Then you became the south.  
If I cut them loose I lose  
everything, which is why.



## Neanderthal Remains

The man we will come to know as Lance  
rolls up in his golf cart and says,  
They put me with the group behind you.  
It's a threesome of Orientals.  
I got fed up, they're so slow.  
The foursome ahead of you is all women.  
Same thing. Mind if I join you?

Scientists recently discovered  
skeletons of new little folk,  
homo like you and me,  
the kind of people that make you wonder  
whether the legends of gnomes endure  
because they're real.

The man we have come to know as Lance  
pulls up in his cart again.  
I was supposed to be with the group behind you.  
The first twosome they put me with went on ahead.  
Would it be okay to play with you guys?  
He complains about all his strokes.  
He stashes bloody marys in his cart.  
He walks backward down hills.

I find lost balls in the woods.  
When I was little  
the ball washing machines fascinated me.  
Put your dirty ball inside,  
turn a crank and watch it  
descend into a black box.  
It pops up again, wet and clean.

Saying Hello

All night I can picture the glow  
on my face changing color.

The stink in this room has mutated  
from flower-vase detritus to molar abscess.

For weeks I've scoured documents:  
top-secret memos, blueprints, terrain maps.

They assigned me to captain Air Force One.  
The President-Elect and I start our new jobs on the same day.

Consider the carbon fiber sheathing that allows Angel, as she's known,  
to penetrate any airspace while remaining safe from prying.

I've taken the initiative to conceptualize  
some new tricks for her, like the screamer

which neutralizes body parts receptive to sound  
and sequesters brain parts at the interface

of language and thought,  
within a half-mile radius.

When he says "yes" to a full demonstration  
that moment will explode inside me forever.

"Did you know she's the reason we can now get  
the internet on commercial flights?" I'll ask.

People like me, people like us,  
we're on the modern-day endangered list.

## Thriller

With a head the size of this room  
yes he could swallow one of us whole.  
With a stomach the size of a Cadillac  
yes he could inhale the whole garden.  
He will often grip his victim firmly and then  
spin violently to rip off chunks of goodness.  
Sitting on this swing I am quite literally  
a target for his swarm and the method  
I've just learned is a technique called Natalie  
which is English for a nostalgic focus on  
the ancient practice of eeling, or feeling.  
It's important to have magnetite crystals  
up in there to guide you for he is willing  
to strike adult humans and I've already been  
in the water with this animal in my house.  
This time is going to be very different and  
to draw him in I have soaked my guts in  
fish clothes. My chainmail socks and butt  
helmet add another level of protection because  
with this guy it's not all about size. You  
could fall into a pack that eats you alive.

Physical Science

Shimmerings glisten.  
Ground leaves  
after weather  
after shadow.  
Tinglings blink.

I snip off  
the end of a cigar  
I smoked half of  
then left to welter  
when it made me sick  
left it to whatever  
in a little flower pot  
that's now for ashes  
thinking it might last  
the emergences  
of spring  
and yes  
it lights.

I spend most of this half life  
making sure the bathroom faucet is off  
watching for blue to close up the sky  
rolling up clothes for something.  
There are no wood nymphs.  
People keep dying.  
Birds keep laughing at me.  
People keep asking.

If this is all there is  
I writhe  
pulling at dirt  
calling out to it  
drawing breaths.  
I writhe on the floor  
bloody myself  
against it  
think of words  
in voices.

This cigar is  
this cigar cutter  
is junk  
is me falling.  
This watching is  
the constant.

## Happy Little Pile-Ups on Jonkershoek Road

An ad reads, "Bikes and Wines."  
Vineyard hopping on bicycles.  
Vineyards sway in the sun under a jagged mountain.  
Birds pause above the jags.  
The road rests like a rock.  
The air is the air everywhere.  
Trees cross by generations.

People come from all over, putting out signals.  
They attract and repel across the earth.  
Sometimes they cancel one another.  
Some meet my gaze. Some look past me.

I am biking down Jonkershoek,  
stopping at a sign with pictures and instructions  
for handling baboon encounters, which I take a photo of  
that in the end I don't need. There aren't any.  
There aren't even any of the baby ones like in the pictures.

The sign at a vineyard entrance reads, "Wine / Lunch / Cake"  
but I find there is no lunch or cake.  
However, I leave fortified  
with a Syrah named for that  
little patch where its grapes grew,  
right there on the mountain.  
I leave with the vision  
of the small castle near  
that little patch where  
a German spends six months of the year.  
Not these six months, though.

These six months, the 'coloured' workers  
are surprised to see this white guy  
bike up the path to the nature reserve  
or the historic gardens or whatever.

Someone sits on a stone bench texting their lover  
whom they have never met in person and  
who texts back that they adore the flower photos  
from The Old Nectars. A deceased woman  
gave these gardens to the state.  
Her flowers are now tended by Richard,  
who went out of his way to secure my bike.

I Don't Think You'd Mind, Charles

The fact that you're not alive anymore  
occurs to me like the intermittent snarl  
of your neighbor's chainsaw all day today  
while I sit in one of your plastic chairs  
smoking a cigar as we would together  
in an alcove of ferns and rocks, young maples and pines  
above your terraced wildflower gardens  
behind which in the woods an hour ago  
I walked and scared four grouse into low flight  
and I swear I heard the huuh huuh huuh huuh  
of a black bear that sent me into low flight  
back here.

Inside, Kay misses you and speaks  
of you often, sometimes as if you were still  
with her, yet she is happy without you  
content to live alone in the wilderness,  
and she doesn't want to spread your ashes  
in the flowerbed where you wanted,  
not until it's thoroughly weeded, or  
she might spread them in a prettier one that's just  
a few yards away.

Since your death, she has  
had to put Maddie to sleep, and old Lumpy  
has lost the use of his hind legs, and it's hard  
because he liked to roam the mountainside  
but now he needs to be dragged and lifted just  
to pee, and the answer everyone thinks of,  
to put his back end into a little carriage,  
probably won't get done before he's too  
much trouble, and it's hard because he's happy.

The Sweet Williams and pale blue Forget-me-nots  
you planted continue to reseed on  
your old green mountain, as it continues  
to break apart so senselessly slowly  
into pieces marked only by the breaking.

## Still

Sitting on a mountain you hear machines,  
you won't fly down that tunnel of branches,  
you can't forget some people. You think in words  
and mosquitoes are up there. They can have you  
they keep thinking as they hover at your lobes.  
Note the secret marking in the junco tail.  
The ragged hawk blows like a thin black bag  
randomly away from anything you think.  
At hundreds of feet the wind takes more chances.  
See, in the foothills the rivers grow deep  
with souls pushed out the bottom, the moon shine  
of all last nights passing through this old man,  
this liver, this press of days. Operate  
the crusher. You can put in trees, boulders.

## The Draining

The day after we buried Tommy  
after we stood and watched a light blue  
syringe empty into his dark blue vein  
and his head fall like a baby's, after  
we put him in a bright box with a toy  
and sprinkled our catnip, the day after  
we walked through slushy snow  
full of prints that the day after  
would be almost all vanished,  
we found a pattern in the snow  
off the trail that could only have  
been made by a boy made of sticks.

We sat on a wooden footbridge  
and watched melted snow flow under us.  
We reached and pulled cold water  
to our mouths and gulped it down.  
Is this the time of year most souls depart?  
There are such things as dumb questions.  
Life is our disease and death is our life.  
At least there is enough water around here  
and talus caves and an underwater town.



## Evocation

My dad fell.  
Subdural hematoma.  
They opened his skull.  
They being the doctors.  
University of Maryland, Baltimore.  
Commas are important. Sutures  
run along his crest, black ones.  
From his ear to his face, too.  
His limbs are bloated. He wears mittens  
so he can't remove the ventilator.  
He communicates facially  
when consciousness does whatever.

They closed one of two lanes.  
They being Hadley, the town of.  
As if it is broken. As if they will fix it.  
A bridge that had been happy  
unrecognized, an unmarked  
section of road. Unless instead it  
cheers to be recognized, finally.  
I don't know. No evidence.  
The anger in my cycling grief  
shrinks. Weeds grow  
over cement and asphalt.

It's Friday, most of us are thinking,  
and we are happy. I'm thinking:  
like all the other bad ones out there  
bad kitty just wants to be loved.  
Someone else: I gotta lose weight  
so I can be thrown around. Or:  
who is in charge, the mountain or the mist?  
When I was smashing a pink lady  
apple on the floor of the Atkins store.  
The shoe of course bigger than its foot.  
Whatever people think. Swaddled.

Let us sing to summon this great  
filter of humanity, day after day  
until someday has always been  
that way, bring it alive in its  
infinitudes with yours  
and the endless ones  
and nils of you  
with mine.

## The Disciples

While some poets can barely  
get their pants to button, others  
seem to just slide right out of them.  
They all have their moments.  
I know one who is being handed  
from one woman to the next  
in one of those “it takes a village”  
villages to this very day.  
Some are trained in special operations  
to neutralize opponents as quickly as possible  
by whatever means are at hand.  
Some sit on the toilet for much longer  
than the rest of us, some  
out of physical necessity while  
for others it’s mental or spiritual.  
Some poets merge with the landscape  
or the sky or the sea.  
One for example is becoming  
a warren for voles down by the stream.  
One became the wind on the Oregon coast.  
Another is pure sunshine.  
Another is lifting his arms slowly  
while dancing in place to an old jingle.

Ablata Causa Tollitur Effectus

*Remove the Cause and Its Effect Will Disappear*

Starting with  
the joint  
of the right  
hallux where

the proximal  
phalanx meets  
the metatarsal  
we observe  
disintegration

that tells us  
he suffered  
from gout.

There is evidence  
of decay from  
a deformation  
that caused him  
to walk tiptoe

at night possibly while  
making a sandwich—

that's a joke—

and as we move  
up the skeleton,  
more clues emerge.

For example, note  
the stress marks on  
the lower vertebrae  
and ribs where  
swings used to  
hang next to the  
monkey bars  
and to the right

we can discern  
the sandbox where  
he and his nursery-  
schoolmates played.

Also, the outward  
bowing of the forward  
lateral radius  
starting from the ulnar  
notch shows

an almost spiritual appreciation  
for electric guitar that snapped  
like the devil's whip at his back  
and we can infer also for drums  
a horde rumbling on his tail,  
keyboards that warped the sacral mold,  
and vocals that filled his parietal sails.

He was a runner almost  
certainly, but these grooves  
show us another habit.

They tell us the number  
of people this man  
loved whom he didn't like.

This is confirmed  
as we examine  
the minute  
structure of  
the inner ear,

remarkably intact.  
Note what we call  
the red carpet lining the  
snail-shell spiral of  
the cochlea.

This is where  
several courtships began and  
ended. We see a bra  
dangling from the bedpost,  
for instance. Entering

the skull via the nasofrontal  
suture is tricky. One  
must be careful not  
to shatter the surrounding  
bones. If we pry it  
apart with barely  
enough force,

black rays  
shine through  
the fissure and we see

revealed a space where  
some have argued he  
spent entirely too much time

but is in fact the site  
of desperation  
in the form of  
a singularity

from which he could  
not escape.

As we zero in,  
training our telescopes  
exactly, looking  
back in time almost  
to his origins,  
we are able to see  
what researchers  
have theorized  
might be there,  
a little light.

## GLOSSARY

### Afterglow

Afterglow is another term for the photon epoch, in which photons dominated the energy of the universe, according to Big Bang theorists. The photon epoch started about 10 seconds after the Big Bang and continued for approximately 379,000 years. Atomic nuclei were created in the process of nucleosynthesis which occurred during the first few minutes of the photon epoch. For the remainder of the photon epoch the universe contained a hot dense plasma of nuclei, electrons and photons.

### Dark Ages

The Dark Ages are thought by theorists to have lasted for the 650 million years starting 150 million years after the Big Bang. During this period, most of the photons in the universe were interacting with electrons and protons in the photon–baryon fluid. The universe was opaque or “foggy” as a result. There was light, but none we can now observe through telescopes.

### False Vacuum

A false vacuum is one that appears stable, and is stable within certain limits and conditions, but is capable of being disrupted and entering a different state which is more stable. A hypothetical “vacuum metastability event” would be theoretically possible if our universe were part of a metastable (false) vacuum in the first place. If this were the case, a bubble of lower-energy vacuum could come to exist by chance, and catalyze the conversion of our universe to a lower energy state in a volume expanding at nearly the speed of light, destroying all of the observable universe without forewarning.

### Great Filter

A Great Filter is whatever prevents dead matter from giving rise to expanding, lasting life. The concept originates in the argument that the failure to find any extraterrestrial civilizations in the observable universe implies something is wrong with arguments that the existence of advanced intelligent life is probable. A Great Filter acts to reduce significantly the number of sites where advanced civilizations might arise. This probability threshold, which could lie in our past or future, might work as a barrier to the evolution of our species, or increase the probability of self-destruction. The main counter-intuitive conclusion of this observation is that the easier it was for life to evolve to our stage, the bleaker our future chances are.

### Scale Invariance

Scale invariance is a feature of objects or laws that do not change if scales of length, energy, or other variables are multiplied by a common factor. An example would be something that looks exactly the same whether viewed through a microscope or a telescope.